

Gov't in a 1 step back, 2 forward shuffle

MalaysiaKini.com

May 10, 2012

By Terence Netto

COMMENT It looks like it is one step backward, two steps forward for the powers-that-be.

In a diametric reversal of renowned communist-style maneuvering tactics, the government has withdrawn the controversial Election Offences Amendments Bill in apparent placation of Bersih supporters.

This is a step back from frontal positions taken up before the electoral reform advocacy group staged its protest of April 28 that ended in clashes between sections of the crowd and police.

The apparent sop to Bersih and its supporters was negated by two steps the government announced yesterday whose effect was to push the movement for polls reform back on its heels.

The government appointed a critic of the April 28 demonstration, former inspector general of police Hanif Omar (*left in photo*), as chairperson of a six-member independent panel of inquiry into reports of violence at the Bersih 3.0 rally.

Also, by arguing that Election Commission chief Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof did not renew his ties to Umno from the time he was first registered as a member, supposedly without his knowledge, the government was signaling it won't yield to Bersih's demands that Aziz quit the post for reasons of bias.

This one step backward, two steps forward stratagem, intimated yesterday by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz typified the overall pattern of responses by the Najib Razak administration towards the movement for political change in the country.

A sop here and a concession there to the reform movement, whose urgency was powerfully conveyed by the results of the last general election, is cancelled out by regressive moves elsewhere.

Insufficient time

The latest raft of measures taken by the government throws into even sharper relief than was the case before this pattern of alternating the concessionary with the coercive.

The Election Offences Amendment Bill 2012 was railroaded through Parliament, together with a host of other bills, on the final day of the House's first meeting this year.

The opposition filibustered in vain against what was a transparent attempt by the government to camouflage regressive aspects of its proposed new laws under a patina of reform to draconian laws on internal security and media operations like the ISA and the Printing Presses and

Publications Act.

Without giving sufficient time to Parliament and public to debate the scope of the reforms it was proposing, the government managed to slide the regressive aspects of the new legislation within the folds of its more palatable features.

The upshot: devious and unpalatable features to the new fangled laws were slid under the rubric of reforms to the old.

The result was that behind the smokescreen of trumpeted reform, nettlesome, even nefarious, provisos were tagged on to the new laws that rendered spurious the government's avowed intention to do away with their draconian predecessors.

The government spurned the opposition's plea to refer the new laws to parliamentary select committees (PSC), denouncing the opposition as insincere in wanting PSCs for some laws and declining it on a hot-button issue such as the rare earth project in Gebeng, in Pahang.

All this conduced to a disheveled and rushed session of Parliament, its haste worsened by pre-election fever.

Furthermore, the announcement by Bersih, after the pressure group had criticised as inadequate the electoral reform measures proposed by a parliamentary select committee, that a sit-down protest would be staged on April 28 ratcheted up the tensions that had hovered over Parliament at its last sitting.

There is a technique in photography called direction blur, which is used to give an impression of speed. The opposition felt, in the final days of the last parliamentary sitting, that they were very much directionally blurred.

Then Bersih 3.0 blew in with gale-like force on April 28 and ended in skirmishes between protesters and police, predictably followed by a welter of recrimination by both sides.

Marxist-Leninist tactics

The government now wants to tranquilise the febrile aftermath with an independent panel to probe abuses committed by both the police and protesters.

In naming former IGP Hanif as chairman of the panel, they have picked someone who had already semaphored his disposition on the issue of whether Bersih 3.0 was a legitimate expression of the right to peaceful assembly.

Hanif has gone on record as having, together with two previous holders of the same office, denounced the Bersih protest of April 28 as insurrectionary in goal and Marxist-Leninist in tactics.

Appointing him chairman of an independent panel to probe the violence would be akin to

choosing Dominic Strauss Kahn to head an enquiry into whether Nicholas Sarkozy had engaged in pre-election sabotage of the chances of potential rivals for the post of president of France.

The notion of Hanif as an impartial moderator simply won't wash.

Likewise the argument that current holder Abdul Aziz (*far right*) was not fatally disqualified for the post of EC chair because he was only briefly and unwittingly a member of Umno; the mere fact that he was an Umno member has rendered his position as neutral interlocutor between competing political parties irretrievably compromised.

The government's tactics of yielding to public pressure on the impropriety of the Election Offences bill while playing a jaundiced hand on the issues of who is to head the independent inquest into police methods during Bersih 3.0 and what is to be done about the current EC chair are a classic instance of one step backward, two steps forward maneuvering.

The irony is that even if it sometimes tars its present-day opponents with the brush of its revolutionary adversaries of a half-century back, it doesn't mind adopting the latter's tactics, with a twist or two.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/197504>